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JEANNE'S BRAVERY.

Felix Labardie had been a French tireur in the great war of 1870, and I liked nothing better in the evening than to sit and listen to his stories of the terrible time when France lay gasping and bleeding.

One evening we had been silently smoking for some time when he said: "Did I ever tell you, monsieur, how I fell into the hands of the Germans and out again?"

"No," I said. "I thought the Germans shot all the guerillas they caught."

"They let me go free, monsieur," he said, with a grim laugh. "It may seem incredible, monsieur, but Jeanne yonder held the life of royalty on her finger tips."

"I should like very much to hear the story," I said.

"Certainly, monsieur, and if monsieur thinks what was done was wrong he must excuse a woman in love."

"After Sedan, monsieur, a meeting was called in our village, and thirty of us enrolled ourselves as a company of Francitireurs. We felt we could do more for France as irregulars than serving under incompetent generals. We were well armed and a brave and skilful old veteran commanded us. As the Germans were in force around Metz we marched in that direction, and made our headquarters in the hills behind a village called Pency, about three leagues from the fortress. It was in Pency Jeanne lived, and from the first moment I saw her, monsieur, I said to myself, 'If fortune is kind, Felix, this girl shall be your wife.' Her father was the miller of Pency, and the accursed Uhlans had almost ruined him. They were very bitter against the invaders and my profession made me find favor in her eyes. Before we had been at Pency a month we had plighted our troth, on the understanding that we should not marry until France was rid of the enemy."

"Small as our band was we made ourselves a terror to the marauding Uhlans, thanks to the generalship of old Montbon. Jeanne was invaluable to us. She was all eyes and ears, and Montbon called her the 'head of the intelligence department' of our band. I used to meet her every evening, when it was possible, in a little cave I had discovered, which, having no outlets, was proof against surprise."

"We staid three month at Pency, and then the place became too hot for us, and we prepared to leave for a village some leagues to the south. I fell into the hands of the Bavarians the very evening before we were to leave Pency."

"Jeanne declares to this day, and I believe rightly, that I was betrayed by a villager, a young fellow named Odean, who believed fate had intended Jeanne for his wife, and who was even savage when she refused him. But be that as it may, monsieur, I was seized at dusk that evening, as I was on my way to meet Jeanne, and taken so completely by surprise that I had not the least chance of defending myself or trying to escape, and, worst of all, was taken with the rifle in my hand."

"You are an assassin," said the stout little officer in command in barbarous French. "You shall be shot. Where are your companions?"

"But I professed not to understand. I was afraid of being shot on the spot. There was much of the executioner and little of the judge in those days, monsieur."

"Much to my relief my arms were bound behind me, and we set out for the hamlet where the Crown Prince Frederick had his headquarters."

"As fortune would have it, Jeanne met us on the road. Monsieur would suppose that Jeanne is a quiet little woman, but monsieur has not seen her thoroughly aroused. She was roused then, monsieur. She flung herself on me and tried to release me. Then she seized the bayonet of a Bavarian, and if I had not begged her for my sake to be calm she would have fought the whole party single-handed. Then she fell to beseeching them, for she could speak German well, but they only laughed at her and drove her off with foul words. My heart was like lead then, monsieur, but I did not know Jeanne."

"I was taken before the prince's adjutant, who promised me liberty if I would betray my compatriots. But I feigned stupidity, and when he found I would tell nothing, he ordered me to be shot at five the next morning. 'We give you till then,' he said, 'to find your tongue. You'll be dumb enough after.' And he laughed."

"I was bound like a log, monsieur, and thrown into a hut and brutally kicked. My thoughts were not pleasant all this time. I lay thinking of Jeanne, who I should never see again, picturing that womanlike, she would go home and weep in her helplessness and despair. But I did not know her then. She was working for me with all the energy and wit of woman. Jeanne, Jeanne, ma petite, come here."

Jeanne came to the door. "Come and tell monsieur how you saved me, ma petite."

A blush overspread Jeanne's features. "What, that foolish story again?"

"Certainly not foolish," I interposed. "I should deem it a kindness if you would oblige me."

"If monsieur wishes it, and monsieur will allow me, I will get my knitting."

"Certainly," I said. "When I saw him carried off," Jeanne began as soon as she was seated, "I was in despair, for I knew what his fate would be. There had been a sharp fight a week before, and I knew Jacques Pellot had possessed himself of some German uniforms that he had taken from the dead. So I demanded them from him and threatened him till he produced them. A sous lieutenant's uniform fitted me nicely, and after cutting off my hair and concealing a pistol and dagger in my tunic I hurried away. I crept along cautiously when I neared the enemy's lines, for my plan was to get through the sentries without being challenged. When I heard the pickets I dropped on the ground and crawled like a snake. And yet I was nearly caught. A German officer was leaning against a tree, and I almost touched him. I lay still without breathing audibly for a long time—how long I cannot say—until he moved away. Then, once inside the lines, I rose up and hastened to the prince's headquarters. I prayed for courage and then walked up to the door. I trembled so that I could hardly speak. Fortunately the officer did not observe my agitation."

"Take me to his highness instantly, I said in my best German. 'Important dispatches.'"

"Who from?" he began. "To his highness instantly," I said boldly, but my knees shook under me. "He looked at me closely in the dim light, and I felt ready to faint. Then without a word, he took me to the prince's room. 'Important dispatches,' he said, knocking and showing me in."

"From whom?" asked the prince. "In private, may I please your highness," I stammered, but feeling that I would not leave without Felix's life or another for it."

"Retire and leave us, Haupe," said the prince, and the officer, closing the door behind him, obeyed."

"And now," said the prince kindly. "You look pale and ill, sir. What is your name?"

"The key was in the door, and I turned it swiftly. 'And now,' I said, pulling out my pistol and pointing it full at his face—my hand did not even tremble at that supreme moment—'your highness,' I said rapidly, 'if you call out, you are a dead man.'"

"Ah, he was a German, but he was so brave, so brave! He did not even wince, but he looked straight into my eyes and smiled."

"Ah," he said, "a stratagem! Who are you, and what do you want?"

"Monsieur le prince," I said, "I am the daughter of the miller of Pency. My sweetheart, Felix Labardie, was taken by your men tonight as a Francitireur. If he is not already dead, he is condemned. I want his life—or you lose yours, monsieur."

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